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INTERVIEW | TOM BAKER (THE FOURTH DOCTOR) - PART 1

"...the situations in DOCTOR WHO were all predictable. Everyone knows which side I'll come down on, so how do you vary the tempo of the story..."

Seeing one of the world's most famous men live on stage is exhilarating but it is even more so to interview him.

On 19 November 1982, just who was Tom Baker?

Later that day, Tom Baker would open a week's run of **EDUCATING RITA**, in which he would play a middle-aged University Don; a baggy, bleary-eyed academic, whose bookshelves hid whisky bottles and who acidic humour hides a sense of failure.

After interviewees with the Press and the customary photographs, Baker turned his wide-eyed attention to the EYE OF HORUS team. Whilst autographing DOCTOR WHO merchandise he told us of the immense interest that there is in America.

> "Do you know in the States at the moment a firm called **LIONHEART** - the people who distribute the BBC work over there? They sent me a very glossy catalogue. It's full of hype but I suppose the facts are true. I was astounded to see that I did 172 episodes of **DOCTOR WHO** and they are cutting it into 41 feature length film cassettes - 41! It's going to be very hard for me to pull back from, especially in America, this **DOCTOR WHO** thing because it is one job people remember me for and it would be stupid of me to get irate about because it is fact of life. It would be like me complaining that I'm going grey of that I'm six foot three. It's something I have to live with. It was a very pleasant time when I was doing **DOCTOR WHO**, I adored it."

The Baker referred to a misunderstanding earlier on during the Press Meeting when a reporter insisted that he wears a multi-coloured scarf but he declined.

> "I don't mind bending to some extent to accommodate and when I'm invited to charity things I do insist that I do come as Tom Baker. Of course, my appearance has also changed. You see I'm two years older now, I'm greyer and I've grown a beard and so I'm not recognised in the streets by children anymore. I was quite interested in my reaction to that sort of thing because you know some people when they stop being recognised feel 'withdrawal symptoms'. I didn't feel 'withdrawal symptoms'; I felt mostly a sense of relief to be anonymous again. I'm not anonymous in my profession, of course."

Still no yet into the interview that we had planned, Tom continued to chat, touching upon the agonising times when his 'Tom Baker' personal life became invaded by the DOCTOR WHO influence.

> "You know I was terribly self-conscious or maybe conscious when I was playing **DOCTOR WHO**. So whenever I was seen in public I was always careful never to be seen smoking, plastered or boisterous in any way so that I never disappointed a child. I would not do anything that might be upset a child, even something which other adults were doing. I wouldn't even drink tea, and if someone offered me a cup of tea or a sandwich, I would say, "No. Have you a jelly baby?" in order to keep that sort of thing rolling among young children and, of course, it worked."

We commented that not only did he work hard on the programme itself but in the vital work of promotion.

> "I adored the promotion. I worked very hard running round all over the world. I went to America, Australia twice, Holland, Germany and Ireland, and certainly to every centre in this country promoting the series. In addition, sending out greeting cards out to young children. Right, let's get down to the questions!"

Researching Tom Baker's most recent roles, he seemed to accept 'fantasy' roles (like DOCTOR WHO and Prince Koura). Was he interested in science fiction/fantasy or was it that he had been 'type-cast'?

> "Yes, they have been extravagant; that's true. I think in any profession, people like to classify you into what you can do best. The theatre, television and filmmakers are largely cautions in the way they cast people, so very quickly you get bracketed for the things you can do best. So inevitably, I have become associated with extravagance and that has pleased me because I do like extravagance. I would rather vintage Champagne than Theakston's Old Peculiar."

No interview with a Doctor, like Baker or Davison, would be complete without the perennial question: What is your most memorable DOCTOR WHO story? So, we put this question to Tom, expecting a short, concise answer but instead got a very full and informative reply, which included behind-the-scenes secrets of direction.

> "I think for some reason **THE ARK IN SPACE was** my most memorable as I admired the designs in that. I got very interested in the designs. A lovely house-style was developed from a very small budget. It didn't matter that the scenery shook or when it came to a shot with me and K9 I had to accidentally get on my knees in order to talk to him."
>
> "One developed a technique in how to do the dialogue in moving scenes, especially if it was difficult to get a 'fishing rod microphone' to track with you in an enclosed set. Sometimes you would have 15 lines of dialogue to get in on the move and, of course, it was impossible."
>
> I knew this more than the Directors because I was doing it every week. So what would happen is they would ask how could get the lines in. I'd say, *"it's an absolute push-over; watch this!"* You see, I'm walking along with this girl and then I would stop and say, *"Sssh!h!"*. She'd say, *"What?"* and I'd say, *"Did you hear that?"* and she'd say, *"No!"* and then I'd say, *"Now, what were you saying?"* She would then say the lines and then we would go. It was terribly simple you see to do that! **DOCTOR WHO** wasn't an acting job - in a sense it couldn't develop. The paradox of television series and serials is that there is no character development and when the character is fixed people don't want it to change. Then the onus on the actor is the make the character as witty and surprising within the predictability of the situation.
>
> The situations in **DOCTOR WHO** were all predictable. Everyone knows which side I'll come down on; which moral attitude I'm going to take. So how do you vary the tempo of the story or how to come through a door? So perhaps when the door opens suddenly I'm not there and then the camera pans downs to find me on my knees because I thought I heard a noise." (Potentially a reference to the most recent story, **FULL CIRCLE**)
>
> "I was playing an alien so it gave you a massive licence, you see, and how do aliens act? We don't know. So I was allowed a ludicrous costume."

An opportunity to move questioning from story direction to costumes.

> "I grew to like the later ones. On that comic."

Referring to DWM issue 51.

> ".we began to get a little operatic, very extravagant and maybe I was becoming tired then. I was unwell during that story.

Referring to THE KEEPER OF TRAKEN.

While thumbing through the comic, Tom came across a photo of Patrick Troughton and named him as his favourite Doctor and one of his favourite actors as well.

Tom had confirmed that THE ARK IN SPACE was his favourite story but did he have a least favourite.

> "I can't say I dislike things but I can remember us having a very difficult time in doing the two Dalek stories, although that story with Davros in was a huge success. He was brilliantly acted; a marvelous character and such a fantastic costume, but that was hard one to do."

DOCTOR WHO Producer. Always a controversial subject. Many fans believe that Graham Williams took the series to an all-time low and that John Nathan-Turner reversed the trend.

We asked Tom if he had any comments on fan attitudes and if he favoured any one Producer.

> "Well, I don't know what the fans' REAL attitude is. I got on very well with Graham and I got on terribly with John now. I hear from John every couple of weeks. He's trying to involve me in a project he's on."

Inquisitively, we asked if the project was the 20 th anniversary special, hoping that he would divulge some secret.

> "Yes, that's right. Of course, I'll do the special when I'm free. John is the only Producer I really socialise with. I've worked with four in all. Just by accident we get on very well with each other; he's very amusing."

DOCTOR WHO MEETS SCRATCHMAN - the movie, scripted by Ian Marter and Tom. What did he remember about the story?

> "I remember thinking that it was wonderful but nobody else thinking it was wonderful, except Ian Marter who worked like a dog on it. Also James Hill, who later directed all of the **WORZEL GUMMIDGE** serials but at the **DOCTOR WHO** didn't like it all"
>
> "The storyline was a kind of **WORZEL GUMMIDGE** horror. A sort of fertilizer goes wrong and animates scarecrows. It was extremely violent. Scratchman was an 'old world' name for the Devil, and was an international mischief-maker. He just wanted to make trouble, and I remember the end that took place on a pinball table. We were going to turn a whole studio into a pinball table. We (the Doctor and his companions) were stuck on the table and Scratchman was firing these balls at us. The balls went down holes that lead to Hell, just full of old Daleks and things like that."
>
> At one time I think we had about £500,000 which was half the budget offered to us by the British Film Finance Company. It looked as if we might raise the rest but it blew 'hot and cold'. It does that on all films."
>
> You see, the funny thing about being an actor is that you've got to get out while you're winning. Now this play is a huge success; huge!"

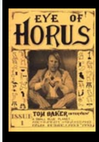
We commented that the present case was similar to the DOCTOR WHO situation. When Tom had left in 1981, he was at the height of his DOCTOR WHO career.

> "That's right. Time to get out. So I'm in this play, with Kate Fitzgerald who is amazing and we're selling out everywhere, filling Opera Houses and big theatres like Newcastle. Then in three weeks time, including this week, I'm going to leave with absolutely nothing signed. But one has to take chance all the time."

NEXT TIME - PART TWO OF THE TOM BAKER INTERVIEW

Tom recalls accidents on the set of **DOCTOR WHO**, his companions and plans for his future.

EOH EXTRA



Tom Baker Interview (part 1) - featured in Issue 1 of **EYE OF HORUS**

Tom Baker as Prince Koura (**THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD**, 1973)

Tom Baker as Rasputin (**NICHOLAS AND ALEXANDRA** , 1971)

Tom Baker in **DOCTOR WHO - THE ARK IN SPACE** - Baker's favourite

Tom Baker in **DOCTOR WHO - THE ARK IN SPACE** - The best set design

Tom Baker in **DOCTOR WHO - FULL CIRCLE -** Always finding a new way to enter a new situation

Tom Baker in **DOCTOR WHO - THE KEEPER OF TRAKEN -** "I was unwell during that story"

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March 29 2026